

ELLEN O. TAUSCHER
10TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON PROJECTION FORCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0510

1034 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
TELEPHONE (202) 225-1880
FAX (202) 225-5914

2121 NORTH CALIFORNIA BOULEVARD
SUITE 555
WALNUT CREEK, CA 94596
TELEPHONE (925) 932-8899
FAX (925) 932-8159

2000 CADENASSO DRIVE
SUITE A
FAIRFIELD, CA 94533
TELEPHONE (707) 428-7792
FAX (707) 438-0523

420 WEST 3RD STREET
ANTIOCH, CA 94509
TELEPHONE (925) 757-7187
FAX (925) 757-7056

Web Address: www.house.gov/tauscher

October 19, 2004

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush,

I am writing out of deep concern for the future of our all voluntary military. I urge your immediate support for an increase in personnel to alleviate the pressure on our force and to allow the United States to respond to future threats. If this does not occur, I am concerned that the current rate of deployment will break the military, threaten our ability to attract the finest men and women to the services, and reduce our capacity to meet additional threats to the United States.

I also request that you fund the increase in end-strength in the regular defense budget rather than through supplementals. The costs of training and equipping new troops are largely predictable. Including the costs of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan in the regular defense budget would put an end to the current fiscally irresponsible pattern of allowing the Secretary of Defense to run up massive debt for future generations in a series of supplementals to avoid hard choices in the defense budget.

Both you and Secretary Rumsfeld have stated that you will only support an increase in end-strength if and when commanders in the field request additional troops. That position is inadequate for several reasons. First of all, training troops takes months at best and they are needed not just to supplement current missions but to enable the United States to fight and defeat additional enemies in new theaters.

Second, I am concerned that regional commanders may be reluctant to ask for additional troops if they perceive that there is a clear message from senior leadership that there are enough troops to do the job. There has been anecdotal evidence from various sources including the Independent Panel to Review DoD Detention Operations that commanders have been unwilling to request additional troops. The Panel noted that "CJTF-7, CFLCC and CENTCOM failure to request additional forces was an avoidable error," and in one specific case observed that "Earlier CJTF-7 has submitted a RFF (request for forces) for an additional judge advocate organization, but CENTCOM would not forward it to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Perhaps this experience made CJTF-7 reluctant to submit a RFF for MP units."

Recently, it was also reported that the commander of a base in Iraq, Logistical Support Area Anaconda, had seen his request for additional troops rejected on two occasions.

This incident calls into question your promise of troops support and threatens the lives of our troops.

It is time to increase the size of the military.

As you know, this month, Congress passed legislation to increase the size of the Army and Marines. This increase is welcome but may be insufficient. Indeed, the mandated Army increase of 30,000 active duty personnel and the additional 9,000 Marines will only occur over five years. It also continues an irresponsible fiscal strategy of funding the increase through supplemental. Such an important issue should be weighed and budgeted against other priorities in the defense budget.

The strain on the military is showing:

A third of active duty personnel is currently deployed in over 100 countries across the globe. Forty percent of Operation Iraqi Freedom is made up of guard and reservists often deployed for back to back rotations because they represent so-called high demand low density skills.

With growing casualties in Iraq and an increasingly unpredictable mission, recruitment is becoming a serious problem. Some 30 percent of the over 3,000 Individual Ready Reserve - servicemen who are called up to back fill currently deployed forces - have failed to report for duty. The Army Guard will fall short of its recruitment goal by 5,000 personnel for the first time since 1994. The Army is below its required level of recruits in its delayed-entry program under which recruits can finish high school or a semester of college before reporting to basic training.

Air Force guard and reservists have been calling for an increase in the size of the Air Force due to the growing logistical requirements of the global war on terror.

Governors are alarmed that National Guard deployments erode their ability to protect their states from terrorism and natural disasters.

To make matters worse, the Pentagon is fighting a losing battle to maintain recruitment and retention levels, using morale-busting stop-loss orders to force active duty troops to stay beyond their tours of duty; lowering recruiting standards for the Army; and allegedly using forceful tactics at Fort Carson, Colorado, threatening soldiers with deployment to Iraq if they do not re-enlist for another term.

We must fix what is now a glaring liability in our ability to conduct stability operations. Refusing to train more troops has major consequences in a global environment where allies with equivalent military capabilities are increasingly scarce; some erstwhile allies are pulling back from our military operations in Iraq; and where access to overseas staging areas and basing is becoming more problematic as we saw with Turkey and Saudi Arabia during the buildup to the invasion of Iraq.

The administration's reluctance to grow the military is astonishing given the massive capabilities required to conduct the National Security Strategy you issued two years ago. The Strategy broadens the mission of the United States to deal with the threat of terrorists

and rogue states, intervene in failing states, reassure and sustain allies, promote democracy and prevent the threat of weapons of mass destruction through possible unilateral preemptive action. All these objectives may involve a military component and one that is labor intensive.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz recently cited one of the crucial conclusions of the 9-11 Commission that a strategy to defeat terror should "include offensive operations to counter terrorism. Terrorists should no longer find safe haven where their organizations can grow and flourish." This mandate implies a range of sustained and relentless military operations across an arc of instability from Northeast Asia, through Central Asia, the Middle-East, Africa and possibly spreading to the Southern Hemisphere where democratic institutions are still shaky.

The number of respected voices calling for an increase in end-strength continues to grow.

The Pentagon's own Defense Science Board warned that inadequate troops size means that the United States cannot sustain our current and projected global stabilization commitments

Army Chief of Staff Shinseki counseled that 200,000 troops were necessary to stabilize Iraq.

Major General Riggs warned that the military needed to be increased to stabilize Iraq.

Retired General Barry McCaffrey warned a year ago that "The Army is accelerating downhill at the moment, and if the course isn't changed, we could damage it significantly or even break it in the next five years."

Even Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz conceded in an April hearing that "There's no question it would be nice right now to have a larger Army."

Increasing end-strength is not a magic bullet and will not bring troops home right away. But over the next few years it will do a number of things:

It will allow the services to meet the long-term mission of stabilizing Iraq, current commitments in Korea and the war on terrorism and future missions.

It will take the pressure off the guard and reserve and let them go back to growing the economy and protecting the homeland, and give the military a larger pool of individual with critical skills.

It will improve recruitment and retention by ending the morale-busting policy of stop lossing troops.

It will ensure better deployment ratios whereby we can ensure a healthier and better trained army that has time to rest, regroup, and re-deploy.

Increasing end-strength needs to start now: Because we cannot foresee events and future challenges to U.S. military power and because increasing the size of the military takes

several years and will be expensive, it must be started now to yield addition ready units in two or three years.

I urge your support for this important measure and look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ellen O. Tauscher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "E" and a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

Ellen O. Tauscher
Member of Congress